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ABSTRACT

Views of students and teachers regarding the characteristics of the "better" teacher were assessed, based on results from a parallel-perceptions survey conducted with students in three diverse institutions. Approximately 838 students enrolled in the 1970s at Harcum Junior College, Illinois State University, and Denison University responded to a 14-item, force-choice questionnaire. At least three-quarters of the students considered the following to be the desired combination of characteristics of the better teacher: a student-oriented teacher, one who leaves class attendance optional, one who allows student participation in classroom discussion, one who allows student direction rather than rigidly following a syllabus, and one who offers most of his time to students. For 28 Harcum Junior College faculty, the following preferences: being student-oriented and offering most of teacher's time to students. Seventy-five percent of the faculty selected the following additional characteristics among their top-ranked preferences: in reorganizing courses, professors should revise them in accordance with professionals' opinions (80 percent); professor is a better teacher if he requires class attendance (75 percent); professor is a better teacher if he maintains a purely academic relationship with students (75 percent); and professor is a better teacher if involved primarily in his own field rather than in campus activities (85 percent). The questionnaire items and the percentage of responses for each item are presented. In addition, a rank ordering of student and faculty preferences is included. (SW)

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VIEWPOINT:- TO EACH HIS OWN
(A parallel-perceptions inquiry)

This article reports results of a parallel-perceptions survey conducted among 838 students in three diverse institutions. Additionally, it compares and contrasts the views of faculty and students at a two-year college.

A. Student Comparisons:

In the views of students, the 'customers' in academe, what do they consider to be the characteristics of the "better" teacher? Some 838 students enrolled, in the 1970s, at three diverse institutions, responded anonymously to a 14-item, force-choice questionnaire. (See B- Harcum Faculty/Students Comparisons, which follows, for a listing of questionnaire items). The instrument items paraphrased questions appearing in Experiments in Sociology (Dean & Valdes, 1967; 282-284) and were used with the kind permission of the authors. All percentages reported are rounded off to the nearest whole number and the student samples consisted of 411 Harcum Junior College women students, 340 Illinois State University sociology students, and 87 women students at Denison University.

Table 1, which follows, summarizes the collective views of these students. The "composite" numbers reflect the averages for the students at both the two-year and four-year institutions. The table also summarizes the assessments of both the Harcum student and faculty (N=28) samples. The listed rank-ordering is based upon the selection preferences of the Harcum students.

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Table 1:- "Better" Teacher Charcteristics

Items: Rank-ordered	Faculty	Students	Composite Students
1. Gives most of time to students	80%	93%	77%
2. Is student-oriented	95	91	85
3. Is admired by students	65	85	74
4. Allows student self-direction	70	83	79
5. & 6. Leaves class attendance optional.	80	80	80
Allows student participation	60	75	69
7. Lectures primarily from supplementary materials	60	75	69
8. Considers student input when reorganizing course	15	69	70
9. Devises background material from direct experience	70	67	60
10. Strives for personal relationship with students	61	61	74
11. In response to a question, gives a direct answer	40	59	60
12. Is average teacher, but gives grades higher than aver. of other profs.	35	56	55
13. Is involved primarily in own field	85	54	63
14. Uses case studies as illustrations	65	53	49

Scanning Table 1, at least a majority of these 838 students opt for each of the selections noted, with all three samples, as well as the Harcum group alone, evidencing virtually the same range of preferences: (Harcum = 54% to 93%; Composite = 55% to 85%). Such unanimity of 'customer' reactions certainly suggests that those on the receiving end of the teacher-learner dyad consistently seek the same teaching 'outcomes'!

It may be further noted that at least three-quarters of these students consider the following to be the desired combination of characteristics of the "better" teacher:

1st- a student-oriented teacher
2nd- one who leaves class attendance optional
3rd- one who allows student participation in classroom discussions
4th- one who allows student direction rather than rigidly following a syllabus, and
5th- one who offers most of his/her time to students

The 'clustering' of these students' responses is evident in the fact that average differences between the Harcum respondents and the total group was only 5.3%; the range of differences being 0 to 17%. Additionally, in only three instances was this difference greater than 10%, and in 7 of the 14 items (50%), the diference was less than 5%.

B- Harcum Faculty/Students Comparisons:

The contrasts and similarities in preferences of the Harcum sudents and faculty samples is evident in the following listing ofquestionaire item responses. The percentages appearing in parentheses are the frequency responses of the faculty sample (N=28).

1. A professor is a better teacher if s(he):
   A. Requires students to follow syllabus strictly = 17% (30%)
   B. Doesn't require students to follow the syllabus and allows self-direction on the part of the students = 83% (70%)

Very clearly, both groups in large measure favor the teacher who allows students self-direction.

2. In reorganizing a course, should a professor revise it according to professional opinion or in terms of students' evaluations?
   A. Professional opinion = 31% (85%)
   B. Student opinion = 69% (15%)

A major difference is noted, each group expressing a very substantial preference for itself, rather than the other. Evidently the 'customers' (students) consider the "better" teacher to be client-oriented rather than profession-oriented, at least insofar as reorganization of courses is concerned.

3. A professor is a better teacher if s(he):
   A. In response to a question, gives a direct answer = 59% (40%)
   B. Motivates research on the part of the student, in respect to a question = 41% (60%)

Although there is considerable ambivalence with the responses of both groups, it is noted that within the range of responses of approximately 20% within each group, there is a complete reversal of group sentiments.

4. Is a professor thought to be a bettter teacher if he requires attendance or leaves it optional?
   A. Requires attendance = 20% (75%)
   B. Leaves it optional = 80% (25%)

Virtually diametrically-opposed viewpoints are evident in the better-teacher model when it comes to class attendance policy.

5. Do students believe a professor is a better teacher if he derives his background material from written sources rather than direct
   experience?
   A. Written sources = 33% (30%)
   B. Direct experience = 67% (70%)

Essentially similar proportions of both groups believe the "better" teacher to be the individual who obtains background materials from direct experience.

6. A professor is a better teacher is s(he):
   A. Uses case studies as illustrations = 55% (65%)
   B. Uses personal experiences as illustrations = 47% (35%)
   (Please see (K) below)

7. A professor is a better teacher if s(he):
   A. Lectures or discusses primarily from the text = 25% (40%)
   B. Lectures from supplementary material = 75% (60%)

(K) - General similarity in expressed group sentiments is evident in this area, with a majority of both gorups expressing preference for use of case studies.

Again, (for 7 above), general group similarity is noted, a majority of both groups casting their votes for supplementary material versus text material.

8. Do students prefer professors who give well-ordered and timely lectures to those who allow more student participation?
   A. Well-ordered lectures = 20% (40%)
   B. Student participation = 80% (60%)

(There is less expressed preference for student participation among the faculty; however a majority of both groups do prefer the student participation).

9. A professor is a better teacher if s(he):
   A. Maintains purely academic relationships with students = 39% (75%)
   B. Strives for personal relationships with students = 61% (25%)

Major differences are evident, a majority of the students considering personal relationships with students as characterizing the "better" teacher. A two-thirds majority of the faculty placed priority upon purely academic relationships.

10. Is a professor involved primarily in his own field deemed a better teacher than on involved primarily in campus activities?
   A. Own field = 54% (85%)
   B. Campus activities = 46% (15%)

Although the students are about equally divided in their views, a very substantial majority of the faculty consider the better teacher to be the individual primarily concerned with matters academic.

11. A professor is a better teacher if s(he):
   A. Nationally known in his field = 9% (5%)
   B. Student-oriented = 91% (95%)

A virtual 'matching' of students and faculty. National prominence is a poor second characteristic of the "better" teacher in the views of both.

12. Do students consider a professor "better" if he spends most of the time doing reading and research, or offers most of his time to students?
   A. Spends most time reading and researching = 7% (20%)
   B. Offers most time to students = 93% (80%)

Large majorities of both groups regard the student-oriented teacher to be "better" than one who devotes most time to reading and research.

13. A professor is a better teacher if s(he):
   A. Admired by professionals in field = 15% (35%)
   B. Admired by his students = 85% (65%)

Although a greater percentage of students expressed preference for student admiration, a majority of both groups selected this option.

14. Do students prefer an average teacher who gives higher-than-average grades or one who is outstanding but gives lower-than-average grades?
    A. Average teacher - higher grades = 56% (35%)
    B. Outstanding teacher - lower grades = 44% (65%)

Although students are more nearly divided in their views, almost twice as many faculty believe the "better" teacher to be the one who is outstanding and more stringent in grade assignments.

Summary:

In terms of preferences, as reflected in the varying percentages who selected these forced-choice options, Table 2, which follows, lists, in descending order of preferences for students, those characteristics of the "better" teacher in which at least three-quarters concur in the judgement. Also included, for comparison, ar the rank-ordered percentages reflecting the faculty sentiments. Clearly, there are some very substantial differences in preferences.

Table 2:- Student/Faculty Preferences

Students	Characteristic	Faculty
1st (93%)	Offers most of time to students	4th (80%)
2nd)91%)	Is student-oriented	1st (95%)
3rd (85%)	Is admired by students	* (65%)
4th (83%)	Allows students self-direction	* (70%)
5th (80%)	Leaves class attendance optional	* (25%)
6th (80%)	Allows student participation	* (60%)
* (54%)	Teacher involved primarily in own field	2nd (85%)
* (39%)	Maintains purely academic relationship	5th (75%)
* (31%)	Prefers professional opinions in course revis.	3rd (85%)
* (20%)	Requires class attendance	6th (75%)

* = Less than 75%

In only two characteristics do at least two-thirds of each group express similar preferences. Beyond these two, teachers express a strong preference for being involved in their own professional field, and for professional colleague's opinions rather than student views when reorganizing courses. And finally, a solid 75% believe that requiring class attendance is a desirable characteristic of the "better" teacher.

In rather sharp contrast, two-thirds or more of the students believe the "better" teacher is one who is admired by students; allows students self-direction; leaves class attendance optional; and allows for student class participation. Most particularly, major differences between faculty and students are noted in the following dimensions:

Table 3:- Student/Faculty Preferences - Major Differences

Students	Characteristic	Faculty
80%	Leaves class attendance optional	25%
61%	Strives for personal relationship with students	25%
31%	Prefers professional colleague opinions in course reorganizations	85%
20%	Requires class attendance	75%
39%	Maintains purely academic relationships	75%
69%	Prefers student opinions in course reorganizations	15%

Turning to the obverse side of the coin, among these 28 forced-choice options, <u>the least valued</u> (25% or less) attributed of the "better" teacher which were selected by either students or faculty included the following:

Table 4:- Least-valued Attributes of "Better" Teachers

Students	Characteristic	Faculty
9%	Is nationally known	5%
7%	Spends most time reading and researching	20%
15%	Admired by professionals in own field	35%
46%	Involved primarily in campus activities	15%
20%	Well-ordered lectures	40%
25%	Lectures primarily from text	40%
69%	Considers student evaluation in course reorganization	15%
80%	Leaves class attendance optional	25%

In Conclusion:

The rank-ordered top-preferences of the 838 students and 28 faculty relating to characteristics of "better" teachers are summarized in the following table:

Table 5:- Rank-ordered Top-preferences of 75% of Respondents

Harcum Students/Faculty	
1st - Offers most of time to students	(3.5th)
2nd - Is student-oriented	(1st)
3rd - Is admired by students	(*)
4th - Allows student self-direction	(*)
5th - Leaves class attendance optional	(*)
6th - Allows student participation	(*)
7th - Lectures primarily from supplementary material	(*)

Composite Students
1st - a student-oriented teacher
2nd - leaves class attendance optional
3.5th - allows student participation
3.5th - allows student self-direction
5th - offers most of time to students

* = Less than 75% ( ) = Faculty rankings

Table 5 'facts' include:

1- Seventy-five or more percent of both the Harcum students and the composite student respondents selected the same five characteristics of "better" teachers as being among their top-ranked preferences; not, however, in the same rank-order.

2- Among the small sample (N=28) Harcum faculty group they 'share' only two of the student top-ranked preferences. Seventy-five percent of these faculty selected the following additional characteristics among their top-ranked preferences:

3.5th- In reorganizing courses, professors should revise them in accordance with professionals opinions. (80%)

5.5th- Professor is "better" teacher if he requires class attendance. (75%)

5.5th- Professor is "better" teacher if s(he) maintains a purely academic relationship with students. (75%)

2nd- Professor is "better" teacher if involved primarily in own field. (85%)

3- The faculty sample clearly opt for professional opinion versus student input when considering course revisions. They also stress mandatory class attendance rather than optional; the maintenance of a purely academic (professional) relationship with students rather than a personal one; and being involved primarily in own field rather than in campus activities.

4- Clearly, both students and faculty share the following preferences in "better" teacher characteristics:

(1) is student-oriented, and

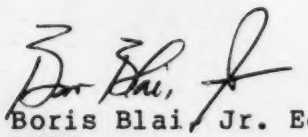
(2) offers most of time to students

5- And finally, the student 'customers' prefer the following additional characteristics in their "better" teachers:

(1) leaves class attendance optional

(2) allows student participation in discussions, and

(3) allows student self-direction rather than strictly following syllabus.



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